



ASSESSMENT REPORT & ACTION BLUEPRINT

ARKANSAS DELTA INITIATIVE

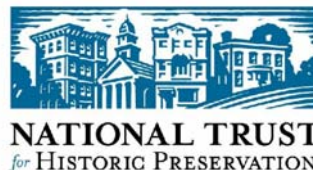
TEAM CONSULTATION: APRIL 5 – 9, 2004

A SERVICE OF MAIN STREET ARKANSAS, DEPARTMENT OF ARKANSAS HERITAGE
in collaboration with the
NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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*Prepared by Valecia Crisafulli
June 2004*





STATE OF ARKANSAS

MIKE HUCKABEE
GOVERNOR

Dear Reader,

I'm pleased to endorse Main Street Arkansas' Delta Initiative Assessment Report and Action Blueprint. This report is based on a one-week Assessment of Delta Main Street communities by a team of professionals who focused on economic development, housing, small business development and heritage tourism. The report culminates the first phase of the Delta Initiative. With the proper local commitment, this initiative has the potential to help us rev up the economic engine of the Delta.

We must tell the story of the generations of Delta residents who forever changed the way we live, work and communicate. In addition to rebuilding cities, we must rebuild the self-image of Delta residents. I'm hopeful people across the state and region will join the Delta Main Street communities in building a heritage tourism base while improving economic development efforts. People in all parts of the Delta have indicated they're eager to work together to pull themselves up. Old rivalries must be forgotten. We also must learn to look more than two or three years down the road. This effort is going to take time, and it's going to require coordination. But it can pay great dividends.

If you're reading this report, you're a Delta stakeholder. I challenge you to consider the recommendations in the report and determine what role you can play.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Mike Huckabee".

Mike Huckabee

MH:st

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Arkansas Delta Initiative is to identify and implement appropriate strategies for preservation-based economic revitalization, using a comprehensive, collaborative approach focusing on five Main Street Arkansas communities in the Delta.

The five Delta communities—Blytheville, Dumas, Helena, Osceola, and West Memphis—share a common heritage based on proximity to the Mississippi River and an agricultural economic base. Due to the erosion of that base in recent decades, as well as the loss of many industrial and manufacturing jobs, the region has been in economic decline. In particular, the historic downtown districts have suffered from years of disinvestment. The current image of the region is not a place where businesses would want to locate or tourists choose to visit.

In order to be successful, new revitalization strategies for the Delta must stress the region's competitive advantages, improve its self-image, and reposition the region as a location of choice.

Main Street Arkansas, a program of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage, is collaborating with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to develop a comprehensive, long-range action plan that addresses:

- cultural heritage tourism development and preservation education
- local small business development and expansion
- neighborhood housing and community revitalization
- preservation economics and planning tools

Strategies recommended for the action plan will build on the region's unique assets and on linkages and collaborations. Findings and outcomes from the initiative will be used to create a nationwide preservation-based model for rural revitalization.

Following a week-long on-site assessment of the five Delta Main Street communities, a national multi-disciplinary assessment team developed four key recommendations to direct the action plan.

1. Enhance the region's potential for cultural heritage tourism.

Current trends in tourism indicate that people are traveling to unique places and seeking unique experiences. The Delta should build events and activities around its blues and music heritage, along with other important heritage themes, and support this strategy by improved marketing, linked trails, and needed tourism infrastructure development.

2. Build business opportunities around local crafts and skills.

The Delta must nurture and support unique, independent businesses and local entrepreneurship, with a focus on authentic arts, crafts, and other skills, rather than try to compete with the retail giants in a highly competitive marketplace. Many small businesses will have the potential for growth and expansion, contributing to a "home grown" economic base.

3. Improve the housing opportunities in historic residential neighborhoods.

The run-down housing stock, particularly in traditional neighborhoods in the heart of Delta communities, indicates a loss of pride among residents and is unappealing to visitors. Efforts to improve the housing stock and upgrade residential neighborhoods will enhance the overall quality of life in the community and make the region more appealing to visitors and business interests.

4. Help the region take advantage of planning tools that protect its unique assets.

The assets that give the Delta its competitive edge —unique architecture, cultural heritage, and human talents—are eroding as fast as its agricultural base. These assets must be protected and enhanced with supportive public policies and financing tools that will keep these irreplaceable resources from being lost.

Obviously, the effectiveness of any economic revitalization plan is the degree to which it is able to be—and actually is—implemented. And its ultimate success is measured by how well it achieves its stated goals of improving the overall economy and quality of life in the region.

The implementation plan for the Arkansas Delta Initiative has two primary phases:

- **Implementation of short-term recommendations from Phase I assessment.** For the most part, this can be accomplished as part of the ongoing work plan of the Main Street communities. The Main Street executive director can provide oversight and serve as a resource, and the Main Street board can direct the effort and monitor progress; but most importantly, standing committees and volunteers will need to be re-focused and re-energized to accomplish the work.
- **Phase II: Implementation of long-range projects and activities.** The broader, more ambitious scope of work outlined to achieve the long-range goal of preservation-based economic revitalization in the Delta cannot be accomplished without additional human and financial resources, a stronger commitment from the local communities, and close collaboration with state, regional, and national partners, including the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This additional commitment, along with a description of proposed Phase II services, is outlined in the assessment team report.

As with all successful Main Street work, the Arkansas Delta Initiative is volunteer-based and partnership-driven. Daniel Burnham wrote, *“Make no small plans”* In order to change the image of the Arkansas Delta and stimulate economic growth by building on the region’s unique assets, a large plan must be in place. The Main Street communities can be catalysts for a new economic direction and new future for the Delta, preserving irreplaceable buildings and an irreplaceable heritage.



PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, at the request of Main Street Arkansas, a program of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage, conducted a five-day assessment as Phase I of the Arkansas Delta Initiative. This new initiative will concentrate multiple state, regional, and national resources over a three-year period on an economically depressed area of the state of Arkansas, which has a number of active Main Street communities. A map of the region may be viewed immediately following this section.

The purpose of the Arkansas Delta Initiative is to bring together multi-disciplinary expertise in the fields of preservation economics, community revitalization, business development and expansion, and cultural heritage tourism development to help Main Street Arkansas communities in the Mississippi Delta region identify and implement appropriate strategies for preservation-based economic revitalization. Specifically, the project will:

- Provide on-site consultation to communities in the region in the fields of preservation-based economic revitalization, business development, and cultural heritage tourism to assess community needs and heritage assets;
- Work with communities to develop a three-year regional plan for sustainable economic revitalization, based on each community's unique heritage and other assets and the collective heritage of the region;
- Provide assistance and resources during the implementation phase (approximately three years);
- Strengthen regional ties and create additional regional networks for economic development and marketing;
- Concentrate an intense set of resources on one economically depressed region that is rich in heritage assets, to create a model for other regions in Arkansas and a model that can be emulated nationwide.

To accomplish this scope of work, staff and consultants from the National Trust will work closely with staff from Main Street Arkansas and the Arkansas Department of Historic Resources, in addition to community leaders in Blytheville, West Memphis, Helena, Dumas, and Osceola—including municipal officials, the Chambers of Commerce, Offices of Economic Development, housing authorities, community development corporations, and key regional leaders, legislators, and local, regional and state tourism entities.

The preservation-based initiative follows a cross-programmatic approach, bringing together National Trust staff members from the Department of Community Revitalization, the Heritage Tourism Program, and the Southwest Office for Phase I. Staff members from Main Street Arkansas also participated in the assessment.

Phase I, which took place April 5 – 9, 2004, included:

- A one-day training, brainstorming, and information gathering workshop for key community and regional leaders, held on April 5. Over sixty community leaders and staff members attended this workshop, which was held in West Memphis at the Civic Center. It included:
 - topical presentations by each team member;
 - a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of regional issues;
 - breakout sessions for brainstorming and issues identification; and
 - reporting and wrap-up from the small group sessions.
- Half-day visits to the five participating Main Street communities. This visit included driving and walking tours and interviews with key civic, business, and government leaders.

This report presents a summary of findings from Phase I, outlining:

- key issues identified at regional and local levels;
- observations and recommendations in three key revitalization areas
 - cultural heritage tourism development
 - local business development
 - neighborhood revitalization and community development;
- a discussion of the major preservation-based strategies that will be used for developing a long-range action plan;
- a three-year action blueprint to be implemented in the region;
- short-term steps for communities and regional entities; and
- recommended resources and partnerships.

Following the presentation of this report and a discussion of the findings and recommendations, Main Street Arkansas staff, National Trust staff, local officials and community leaders, and representatives of key partnering agencies will determine how best to proceed with a long-range program of preservation-based economic development services for the region. While it is not expected that Main Street Arkansas and local partners will be able to adopt every recommendation, the comprehensive menu of services and resources available will allow the State of Arkansas to formulate a plan for ongoing work in the Delta. The end result should yield a model that can be replicated in other economically depressed areas of the state and throughout the country.



MAP OF ARKANSAS DELTA REGION





SECTION I: KEY ISSUES

A preservation-based economic revitalization is appropriate for this region of Arkansas that has suffered disproportionately from the loss of its agricultural base. Though the region has defining characteristics, it is far from homogenous. A unifying element for the purpose of this initiative is the five designated Arkansas Main Street communities located in the region—Blytheville, Dumas, Helena, Osceola, and West Memphis—which have the potential to be a catalyst for economic revitalization of the area.

In a one-day workshop attended by over sixty leaders from the Main Street communities, regional officials and state officials, and partnering entities, participants were led through a SWOT analysis that identified key Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that need to be addressed in the region. The table on the next page summarizes the common issues and concerns raised during the group discussion.

POINTS OF COMMONALITY

The five Arkansas Delta Main Street communities are bound by their common location along the Mississippi River, which is the source of a rich heritage based on the river, blues and other indigenous music, and the river's important role in agriculture. The towns are all in relative proximity to large metropolitan areas (Memphis, Little Rock).

A key point of commonality within the region is the general economic decline, characterized by the erosion of the agricultural base, loss of industry, and resulting high unemployment. Poverty levels are high, though there is still residual wealth; the middle class appears to be disappearing.

The region is losing population. In particular, communities are worried about the “brain drain” of youth and talented people who find job opportunities and the quality of life more attractive elsewhere.

In general, people feel that the region has a negative image. Communities cite negative perceptions about the public schools and racial divisions as reasons why people are leaving, though many are very supportive of the school systems. Almost everyone says that more important divisions are in socio-economic and education levels, rather than along racial and ethnic lines.

The historic downtowns have been in decline, though this is not unique to the Delta. Commercial properties are deteriorating, and many property owners do not have financial resources or incentives to reinvest. Even more evident is the loss of small, locally owned businesses, many of which have been adversely affected by sprawling big box development closer to the highway. Though there are some successful downtown businesses, most are struggling to compete.

Probably the determining factor in whether or not the region will be able to succeed with a long-term revitalization plan has more to do with organizational and civic capacity than anything else. Though many people from the public and private sectors are committed to the effort, there seems to be a general lack of unified leadership and willingness to work together, particularly across town, county, regional, and state boundaries. Lack of knowledge about available resources and the inability to access those resources are related problems. Many people are apathetic. Others are waiting for someone else to come to their aid, rather than understanding that capacity needs to be built from within. These are generalized observations, of course, and exceptions can be found in every community.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

Distinctive history and cultural heritage of the region

- Agriculture heritage
- Mississippi River
- Scenic byways
- Blues and music heritage
- Mystique and history

Historic, architecturally attractive building stock

Main Street programs and their capacity building

Community leadership

Friendly people

Education

- Higher educational institutions
- Public schools*

Recreational opportunities

City planning*

Low cost of living (*also indicates depressed economy)

- Inexpensive labor
- Real estate

Industries (*though industrial base is declining)

- Agricultural base that still exists

Transportation

- River
- Highway system*
- Rail system

Overall quality of life

Weaknesses

Racial divisions

Socio-economic differences

- Absence of middle class

Perception that public schools are not very good

General sense of apathy

Negative public perceptions of the Delta

Transportation

- Highway system*
- Lack of an interstate highway in the southern part

High unemployment

Poor housing stock

Lack of public access to river

Lack of capacity

- Lack of leadership
- Lack of volunteer base
- Inability of different initiatives to work together
- Lack of shared vision
- Lack of awareness of outside assistance
- Lack of technological sophistication
- Lack of access to capital

Lack of community pride

Poor city planning*

Environmental issues

- EPA issues
- Agriculture contamination
- Mosquitoes
- Water-related issues

Opportunities

Partnerships

- Abundance of non-profit initiatives
- Availability of outside assistance

Real estate development

- Availability of downtown buildings
- Brownfield redevelopment*
- Equity fund for Delta region

Transportation

City planning*

Community college access

Growing Hispanic population

Tourism

- Blues
- Great River Road
- New tourist information centers

Threats

Racial and ethnic divisions and differences

Loss of population

- Brain drain
- Loss of "haves"

Loss of small business

- Big box development

Loss of historic property

Deteriorating infrastructure

Brownfields

Negative perceptions of the Delta

City planning*

No funds available

- No grants available
- Not taking advantage of what's available

Public schools

Unemployment

Loss of family farms

Project failure through lack of coordination

- Staff person
- Formal structure

* Denotes items that also appear as negatives.

POINTS OF CONTRAST

Though common issues are shared by all five Arkansas Delta communities, there are several key points of contrast.

- Blytheville and West Memphis have more industrial base than the other communities, though many employees, especially top management, live elsewhere.
- West Memphis, due to its proximity to Memphis, is much more suburban and auto-oriented than the others. Most of the commercial structures are more recent architecture, with not as much potential for upper-story development.
- Osceola, though the most picturesque of the communities with a historic courthouse square, has the smallest core of viable retail businesses, which will make business development more difficult. This is also true of Dumas.
- Dumas is more geographically isolated from the others and is farthest from the river. It is also the only community not on an interstate highway.
- Helena has the strongest blues heritage and the nationally recognized King Biscuit Blues Festival, with the Delta Cultural Center as a significant asset and resource. However, Helena shows the most critical physical and economic deterioration. Its proximity to the Isle of Capri Casino has also changed community economic and social dynamics.

The revitalization plan for the region will need to be customized to recognize these and other differences among the individual communities.

Realistic Potential for Success

As leaders of the Delta Initiative review and discuss items identified on the SWOT analysis, it will be important to distinguish between:

- Items that are *root causes* of the economic decline and those that are *symptoms*
- Items over which the communities have *little or no control* versus those that *can be controlled or influenced*.

A preservation-based approach to economic revitalization will not be able to solve all the region's social problems. For example, many of the issues dealing with race relations, poverty, crime, and the quality of the public schools are beyond the scope of work of this project. However, because the National Trust's approach to community revitalization is inclusive and partnership-driven, it has the potential to impact positively many of these other areas.



SECTION II. CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Many communities across the country, including towns in economically depressed areas and in rural regions, are using cultural heritage tourism as a primary economic development strategy. With the loss of manufacturing and industrial jobs from these areas, tourism is emerging as the “new industry.”

Cultural heritage tourism, as defined by the National Trust’s Heritage Tourism Program, is traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. The definition is broad-based, to incorporate cultural, historic, and natural resources.

OBSERVATIONS

There is a tremendous amount of cultural heritage tourism potential in the Arkansas Delta.



Rich Local Heritage

Music heritage is perhaps the most unique and identifiable theme running through the area. Memphis and the Mississippi Delta share this heritage and should be considered as potential partners. Heritage assets include:

- Music heritage (blues, gospel, country, etc.)
- Agritourism
- Black Heritage
- Native American/archeology
- Military heritage (Civil War, WWII)
- Mississippi River/Great River Road
- Architecture
- Arts/crafts
- Industrial heritage (e.g. American Greetings, Dumas Cotton Gin)



Delta Cultural Center

The Delta Cultural Center in Helena provides high-quality, state-of-the-art interactive museum exhibits showcasing the heritage of the Arkansas Delta. The Delta Cultural Center should be tapped as a model and mentor for other museums in the Delta.

State Welcome Centers

There are three state Welcome Centers located in the Arkansas Delta, and all three are next in line for a major makeover. According to the recently released *Arkansas Tourism: Marketing the Great Unknown* report, “. . . The next three centers identified for replacement are at Blytheville, Lake Village, and West Memphis. The existing facilities at Blytheville and West Memphis are located on interstates and will be replaced by 6,000 square foot buildings . . . Native stone and large timbers will be used in the construction of all the new buildings in an effort to make them recognizable to travelers as Arkansas Welcome Centers . . . Amenities will include more space for brochures, large restrooms, interactive exhibits, big-screen monitors, state-of-the-art computers with kiosks and a picnic area.” While a promising opportunity, it should be noted that budget constraints mean that it will be several years before this next phase of improvements is initiated.

The Arkansas Delta still has a long way to go to develop fully the region’s tourism potential.

- Many attractions keep limited or irregular hours.
- Distance between attractions makes it more challenging to provide a “critical mass” of things to do in the area. Some of the major areas of interest (e.g. music, agriculture) require knowing about events or weekend performances or are tied to seasonal growth cycles, making sharing this heritage more challenging.
- There is a lack of good/unique restaurants, particularly downtown.
- While lodging is available just outside most Main Street communities, there is limited historic lodging and/or lodging located downtown.
- Downtown shopping opportunities that would appeal to travelers are spotty (e.g., That Bookstore in Blytheville, antique stores in Helena and West Memphis, blues music store in Helena).

There are examples of proven tourism success in the Arkansas Delta, mostly with events and to a lesser extent, group tours.

- King Biscuit Blues Festival (Helena) (attracts 100,000/yr)
- Lights of the Delta (Blytheville) (attracts 50,000/yr)
- Osceola Music Fest (Osceola) (6,000 anticipated for Friday night)
- Group Tour Experience (Blytheville, Helena, West Memphis)



Short term, tourism in the Arkansas Delta means strengthening existing businesses and making new businesses viable. It will be important to look for opportunities to develop and support businesses that serve both the local and visitor market to keep businesses viable.

The greatest short term tourism opportunities in the region lie in expanding events and recruiting groups for organized tour experiences.

- Despite the challenges of the group tour market, this niche has potential for the Delta. The challenges of the group tour market include:

- While cultural heritage travelers are twice as likely to take a group tour as other U.S. travelers, it is still a relatively small part of the overall cultural heritage tourism market (7 per cent vs. 3 per cent).
- It takes a minimum of three years to break into the group tour market, and attending motorcoach trade shows can be costly.
- The group tour market has potential for the Delta because:
 - Several of the Delta Main Street communities have a local partner who has successfully tapped into the group tour market (Blytheville through the Lights of the Delta event, West Memphis through the Crittenden County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Helena through the Delta Heritage Tours.)
 - The cultural heritage attractions of the Delta are currently showcased best through an organized tour for a group that includes live performances, local food, and other engaging experiences.

Types of group tourists that are already coming to this area include:

- High school reunions
- Church groups
- Family reunions
- School groups
- Event or festival participants

Other potential group audiences for the Delta include music and music interest groups. In addition to the groups listed above, West Memphis and Helena attract gaming travelers to Southland and the Isle of Capri, respectively, and Dumas attracts sportsmen for the prime hunting and fishing opportunities in the area. As research indicates that these kinds of travelers (gaming, hunting and fishing) come with a single focus in mind, there will not be much crossover with this audience and the heritage tourism market.

The most challenging aspect of tourism development in the Arkansas Delta will be attracting the individual traveler.

The kinds of individual travelers coming to the Arkansas Delta include:

- Through travelers
- Great River Road travelers
- Visiting Friends and Family (VFR)
- Delta/Region Residents

Baby Boomers make up an ever-increasing portion of the cultural heritage tourism market. Boomers are more sophisticated travelers than the previous generation and are looking for “value added” experiences. They tend to travel individually, with family or friends, and primarily by automobile. They are not inclined to participate in group tours unless the offerings are highly experiential and unique.

CASE STUDY: CAPTURING THE THROUGH TRAVELER MARKET

Hays, Kansas (population 20,000), gets many through travelers driving the interstate on their way to the Rocky Mountains. To capture a greater share of these visitors for their hotels and motels, the Convention and Visitors Bureau started to offer a variety of free twilight tours. These tours keep visitors in Hays at that crucial hour when decisions about where to spend the night are being made, and the tours became so popular that travelers frequently plan their return trip through Hays to coincide with one of other twilight tour offerings.

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Joint Marketing

Short Term

- a. **Create a joint seasonal calendar of events.** The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism offers a seasonal Arkansas Calendar of Events publication where events can be listed free of charge. Changes or last-minute additions can be made at any time on the electronic version of the calendar of events, which can be found on Arkansas's website at www.arkansas.com.
- b. **Shared marketing materials** can help to cross-promote events across the Delta. Mail a package of event and other marketing materials to the other Delta Main Street communities.

Create joint seasonal promotions and press releases, dividing up the responsibilities so that each Main Street manager takes the lead for one of the promotions each year. The possibilities are endless, but promotions could be centered on shared themes, events, or seasonal activities such as:

- "Winter Blues in the Delta" (Winter/Spring)
- Create a calendar of live entertainment in the Delta tied to a specific weekend, week, or month of the year.
- "See it Made in the Delta" (Summer)
- Industrial and agricultural tours with specific dates when the public is invited, as many of these tours are normally only open to groups by appointment. Create a calendar of tours rotating among the five communities.
- "Spirits of the Delta" event (October)
- "Holiday Happenings in the Delta" (Winter)

Long Term

- c. **Strengthen relationships with key regional and state tourism partners** such as the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism, the Arkansas Delta Byways Tourism Region and the Great River Road Scenic Byway. This could include:

- Cooperative advertising opportunities.
- Helping to shape the exhibits at the new Welcome Centers proposed for this region.
- As the new Welcome Centers may be years away due to budget constraints, work with current Welcome Centers to encourage more interactive exhibits and information to encourage travelers to spend more time in the Delta.

For example, at the Blytheville Welcome Center visitors often jump the fence to the adjacent cotton field to pick some cotton. Consider an interactive exhibit about cotton that would allow visitors an opportunity to pick cotton and learn about how cotton is processed, including information about places in the Delta where visitors can experience more of the area's agricultural heritage.

d. **Develop an image campaign for the Delta.**

- Develop a logo (tied in to the "DeltaMade" business strategy).
- Develop joint marketing materials that convey a consistent "Delta image."
- Develop murals in Delta communities to tell the story of the Delta through art.
- Identify famous spokespeople and develop a promotional campaign.

2. Community Pride

The first audience for the Arkansas Delta experience should be local residents.

Short Term

- a. Begin to **gather tourism data** as a baseline, and continue to track data on a regular basis. This information will be invaluable to demonstrate the impact of this effort in the community to residents and sponsors.

Long Term

- b. **Develop a "Delta Diamond" program** that includes elements such as:

- A program in elementary schools to teach local history and build community pride in the Delta to augment local history taught in the 5th grade.
- High school program to teach hospitality skills and provide training for front-line tourism positions in the Delta. This program can also be used in the work force training programs in communities throughout the Delta.
- A public awareness campaign designed to reach residents of the Delta.

CASE STUDY: BUILDING COMMUNITY PRIDE

In Nappanee, Indiana (population 5,500), residents participating in a tourism development project initially asked, "Why would anyone want to come to Nappanee?" To counter this, the local paper ran an ongoing column called "Why Nappanee is Special to Me" featuring person-on-the-street interviews with a photo each week. Having local residents reinforce the good things about Nappanee helped build community pride.

CASE STUDY: "WHAT'S IN A NAME?"

In Virginia, the organizers of a hospitality training program were frustrated because the only people who came to their training sessions were the ones who already did a good job. To increase the appeal of the training, they advertised it as a Pig Pickin' and included a hog roast and other fun activities along with the training—and now they have no problem attracting a crowd.

CASE STUDY: FUN AND GAMES WITH HOSPITALITY TRAINING

The scenic byways program in Colorado has developed a *Grassroots Training Program* that includes a board game called the *Byway Road Trip*. As players move their cars around the board, they have to correctly answer questions that visitors might ask about Colorado's scenic byways in order to move forward. The game was designed to be given to front line employees to be played (with the blessing of the boss!) on breaks and during slow shifts.

3. Event Expansion

Expand existing events with linkages between communities and linkages within communities.

Short Term

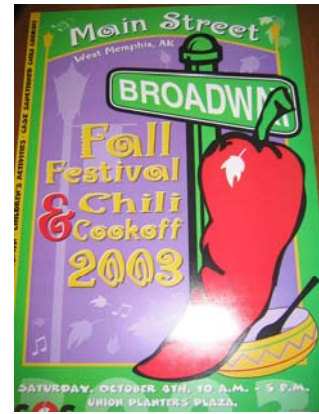
- a. **Build collaboration between communities for existing events.** For example, expand the group tours for Lights on the Delta to include more activities in downtown Blytheville as well as including nearby Osceola. Building on the holidays as a time to send greeting cards, an additional add-on could include a tour at American Greetings in Osceola to see how greeting cards are made. A tour of the private Florida mansion (ideally decorated for the holidays) could provide an additional tour and fundraising opportunity.

West Memphis used to offer a "Blues on Broadway" event with the Crittenden County Arts Council, the Crittenden County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Chamber of

Commerce. The “Blues on Broadway” partnership and the event should be revived as an evening event in West Memphis.

Long Term

- b. Look for opportunities to **offer pre- or post-event activities in other communities** that are on the way to or from the community hosting the main event.
- c. **Explore group tour opportunities** tied to specific events.
- d. Look at ways to **increase the profitability of events**. Reinvest event proceeds into each community such as adding a retail component or offering add-on activities for an additional fee.



CASE STUDY: CHEYENNE'S FRONTIER DAYS

Cheyenne, Wyoming (population 50,000), involves just about everyone in town to make the annual week-long Frontier Days event a success. With over a century of experience under their belts, the Frontier Days organizers have worked out many creative strategies to keep the event running smoothly. They have also found ways to generate profits from Frontier Days that fund a year-round museum in Cheyenne as well as providing funds for recreational amenities such as tennis courts that benefit the entire community.

4. Packaged Itineraries

Short Term

- a. The Mississippi River Trail is under development as a 10-state, 2,000-mile bike trail that begins at the headwaters of the Mississippi and ends in the Gulf of Mexico. **Create suggested biking itineraries** to include in existing marketing and interpretive materials, and design weekend biking itineraries for the individual traveler. (www.mississippirivertrail.org)

CASE STUDY: COMBINING HERITAGE WITH THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Studies about cultural heritage travelers show that they are more likely than other kinds of travelers to take part in multiple activities while traveling, and experiencing the outdoors at places such as state and national parks are especially popular. In New Hampshire, a group of inns got together to offer a cross-country ski weekend package that allows guests to ski from inn to inn (their bags are transferred via van) so they can enjoy the outdoors during the day and relax in a historic inn each evening.

Long Term

- b. Once your communities are prepared for the individual traveler, **design and market weekend packages** to showcase the best of your community. Refer to the recommendations

from the Arkansas Main Street Resource Team and/or Annual Program Review visits for each community for more information on what should be done before launching a promotion for the individual traveler. Consider designing initial packages around a festival weekend when there is a lot going on to interest visitors. Test the itinerary and tour with a “dry run” before marketing it widely.

The Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism offers opportunities **to list “Hot Deals” on the Arkansas tourism website**. Currently, the only two packages in the Delta region include a “Southern Style Getaway” at the Edwardian Inn in Helena and a “Romantic Weekend” in Piggott.

Connect with ASU in Jonesboro. The college faculty and ASU students (and their parents) will be a good market to tap.

- c. **Create a region-wide event that links Delta communities together.**

CASE STUDY: RIDE THE ROCKIES

Every year the Denver Post sponsors a week-long biking event that takes cyclists through some of Colorado's most spectacular mountain scenery. Participation is limited to 2,000 and determined by lottery. Daily rides range from 35 to 100 miles, and cyclists spend the night in host communities selected for each year's event. The event brings visitors into many smaller mountain communities and attracts a great deal of positive press.

5. Expanded Programs and Group Tours

Short Term

- a. **Support the Delta Heritage Tours in Helena as they expand** their tour offerings from a blues music and black heritage tour to include additional tour offerings such as the proposed Sacred Spaces tour.

Long Term

- b. **Revive the agricultural tours** that were coordinated by the Crittenden County Convention and Visitors Bureau and others and explore other opportunities for agricultural tour development.
- c. **Develop new tour offerings** such as a Black Heritage Tour and a Delta Sampler Tour. Consider developing “hub and spoke” day tours that could include:
- West Memphis's heritage (This is where many blues musicians lived and played in the after-hours clubs.)
 - Blytheville and Osceola
 - Helena

CASE STUDY: TRAVELING THE BLUES HIGHWAY

A number of tour operators offer group tours focusing on Blues and American music heritage. The UK based Roots of Rhythm (www.rootsofrhythm.com) offers tours such as 14-day "America for Blues Lovers" or the flagship "Blues Highway" trip from New Orleans to Chicago. Sweet Magnolia Tours offers day trips such as the "Memphis to Clarksdale Delta Blues Heritage Tour" (www.sweetmagnoliatours.com), and the Generations Tour Company offers an eight-night Nashville to New Orleans "Roots of American Music" tour (www.generationstouringcompany.com).

6. Interpretation

Providing meaningful experiences for individual travelers is one of the greatest challenges facing the Delta due to the issues outlined earlier. To address this challenge, **consider long-term interpretive strategies** that will link Delta communities and provide a cohesive regional travel experience, such as:

- interpretive infrastructure such as interpretive signage or kiosks;
- expanded and coordinated interactive exhibits in attractions along the Delta;
- developing regional brochures;
- developing regional driving tour booklets; and
- developing audio tours.

7. Tri-State Linkages

An additional long-term strategy would be to build a **working relationship with the Mississippi Delta and Memphis** with the ultimate goal of establishing a multi-state National Heritage Area. Memphis contacts could include the Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau. The Crittenden County Convention and Visitors Bureau is already a member of this organization.

At present, there are 24 heritage areas that have been designated by Congress. According to the National Park Service, a National Heritage Area is "...a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography." Heritage areas designated by Congress receive limited technical and financial assistance from the National Park Service as well as an annual federal appropriation for a certain number of years. To find out more about National Heritage Areas, visit <http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/>

The Mississippi Delta has also begun to collaborate to promote their heritage, and many of the same themes and issues cross over the state lines. The Mississippi Main Street Program should be the initial point of contact. Through Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, a Blues Highway Association was formed in the fall of 2002. In October of 2003, the Mississippi governor issued an executive order to form the Mississippi Delta Blues Commission to develop a marketing plan for Mississippi to take advantage of the blues heritage. In June 2004 the Delta Regional

Authority (DRA) hosted a “Tourism First Step Meeting” for Mississippi in Clarksdale as the DRA is focusing on tourism as an economic development opportunity for the region. Delta State University has also played a key role in cultivating political and local support for a Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area. If approved by Congress, this National Park Service designation could bring national recognition and federal funding to the area (*contact: Luther Brown at lbrown@deltastate.edu*).

The National Park Service is currently encouraging potential National Heritage Areas to first seek designation at the state level. There are some states like Maryland that have established formal heritage area programs at the state level. Other states, however, have used a political approach to designate heritage areas at the state level. As Arkansas does not have a statewide heritage area program, the latter approach is recommended in this case. Designating the Arkansas Delta as a heritage area at the state level in Arkansas and working toward national heritage area designation could provide partnerships and funding that could be invaluable for the region. It should be noted, however, that the National Heritage Area designation process is a time-consuming political process that requires a tremendous dedication of resources to pursue with no guarantees of designation or the amount of federal funding.

As the Arkansas and Mississippi Delta share a common heritage, it would be ideal to create a multi-state Delta National Heritage Area. As Mississippi is currently further ahead in this process, it will be up to Arkansas to catch up to the planning and development efforts that have already taken place in Mississippi, and to convince Mississippi that the additional coordination it will take to build consensus for a multi-state heritage area will result in an even stronger heritage area that will benefit all involved.



SECTION III: LOCAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

If a revitalization plan for the Arkansas Delta is going to be successful, it must include strategies for developing and expanding local business opportunities. The region has suffered an acute loss of agricultural and manufacturing jobs that formerly sustained the economy. National trends indicate that those jobs will continue to erode.

Blytheville and, to an extent, West Memphis still benefit from a fairly substantial manufacturing base, and manufacturing is growing in Osceola with the addition of the Denso plant and a newly announced auto plant in nearby Marion. Major manufacturers are now making location decisions based on quality of life factors and on where people want to live. Job growth nationally is in the service, information, healthcare, and lifestyle sectors, including travel-related industries and the emerging “creative economy.” The Arkansas Delta needs to reposition for these economic shifts.



This is particularly true for rural communities. The “value-added” approach first developed for agricultural products to increase the value of raw materials before they leave the community can also be applied to local arts, crafts, skills, and services. Adding value to local products can help improve the export-import balance for the Delta, which translates into economic development. State government officials need to understand and support this approach.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL BUSINESSES

Growing the economy from *within* the region has several distinct advantages. Locally owned businesses:

- Provide community identity
- Differentiate the community within the regional marketplace
- Provide diversity for the business mix
- Provide a more interesting environment for tourists and visitors
- Have the potential to be unique destinations
- Are more likely to do business locally
- Keep dollars circulating longer within the community
- Make their own decisions about expansion or closure
- Can spin off or attract complementary businesses
- Are more likely to understand and be responsive to individual community issues and dynamics
- Are more likely to be involved in the community and support local causes and activities

- Are a source of community pride
- Maintain a sense of community
- Enhance the quality of life for residents
- Support larger-scale business recruitment and attraction efforts

This report focuses primarily on issues and recommendations relating to small, locally owned businesses, recognizing that larger-scale industrial recruitment is currently being carried out by the Chambers of Commerce, municipalities, and other economic development entities. However, since small businesses often have the potential to expand into manufacturing operations and create a significant number of jobs, local business development needs to be part of the region's collective, collaborative economic development strategy.

The focus is also primarily on the historic commercial districts within the region, in particular, the five Main Street districts, since these areas are the primary focus of Main Street Arkansas and have the most potential to incubate and attract small, locally owned retail businesses. However, the strategies also relate to local business development throughout the region and are meant to be inclusive rather than exclusive.

OBSERVATIONS

Market-Driven Strategies

Currently there appears to be relatively little information about current and potential markets in the region, or, if this information is available, many local business owners do not know how to use it. Since resources are scarce, it is important to concentrate on market segments that have the most potential for success.

On preliminary observation, these segments would appear to be:

- Cultural heritage tourism market (addressed in the previous section)
- Niche specialty markets, some of which are common throughout the region, others more specific to each community
 - Local skills and crafts
 - Antiques and home furnishings
 - Other destination retail
- Retiring (or returning) baby boomers
- Existing employee base in each community

Although the **youth market** is typically not strong in small, rural communities, strategies to attract and involve this segment are extremely important in helping stem the “brain drain” of the brightest and most talented young people from the Arkansas Delta.

Market needs and wants should be balanced with the realistic potential of businesses to succeed in the region. Current demographics may not support certain types of businesses, such as higher-end clothing stores. Even more importantly, ingrained behavior patterns, such as heading to Memphis for nightlife and entertainment, are slow to change. It is important to begin with small, achievable efforts.

Then, as the market begins to grow and expand, other types of business attraction and development may be possible.

Local Business Assets

There are already a significant number of strong, locally owned business assets in the region.

They include:

- That Book Store and other long-standing businesses in Blytheville
- Antique, home furnishings, and accessories shops, particularly in Helena and West Memphis, but also in other communities
- Several entertainment venues, including the blues stage and theater in Helena, the theater in Dumas, and the civic center in West Memphis; also, the blues-related shops in Helena
- Delta Cultural Center
- Several auto-oriented, traditional retail and service businesses along Broadway in West Memphis.



Business development efforts should start with these strong areas, looking for ways to enhance and build off of existing assets.

There are also indicators of strong potential with other clusters:

- Web-based and other location-neutral businesses
- Home-based businesses
- Music-related businesses
- Sports, recreation, and leisure businesses
- Educational and “how-to” businesses

Business Development Liabilities

There is a general lack of restaurants in the region, both in quality and variety. This must be addressed as soon as possible if other business development efforts are to succeed, particularly cultural heritage tourism. Entertainment and nightlife are also lacking.

Many existing businesses lack capacity. Business owners are inexperienced and lack training.

Many businesses lack adequate financing. They are undercapitalized at startup and do not have the ability to secure financing. Small business lending is considered too risky, particularly to retail and restaurants, and conventional financing is frequently unavailable.

For many people, the Delta has a negative image. Whether real or perceived, this needs to be addressed if the region is going to be attractive as a business location or as a tourism destination. Issues

of poverty, crime, and ethnic and racial divisions, while not within the scope of this study, have a serious impact on local business development.

The highway system and sprawl development have had a negative impact on downtown businesses. Several communities have aggressively pursued big box development to the detriment of locally owned businesses. In other communities, the interstate highway has made it easy for travelers to bypass downtown on the way to other destinations. In Dumas, U.S. Highway 65, though not an interstate, has been the primary means by which people travel through, rather than to, the community, and businesses have selected the highway location because of the traffic count.

Business development should begin locally and build incrementally from that base. Currently, the region does not offer a strong potential for attracting outside businesses and national chains, other than the discount market, which can take local business away from the community. Building a solid local business base can help spur interest from outside the region.

Initial emphasis should be on stimulating the development of retail shops and restaurants. These are the types of businesses that are most needed, and their absence helps reinforce the impression that the area is not economically or socially vibrant.

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Market Analysis and Identification

Short Term

- a. **Complete important business and consumer surveys** that can help guide business development efforts. These include:
 - Surveys of existing businesses in the Main Street districts, primarily to determine:
 - their perceptions of the district
 - what types of business assistance they need
 - what market segments their business is serving
 - Customer surveys, to determine customer profiles and preferences
 - Tourist surveys, again to determine profiles, preferences, and spending patterns
- b. Hold a meeting with business owners and other key revitalization leaders to **review the recommended target markets** outlined above. Agree on which markets are appropriate for the community. Share information with all business owners. In going forward, make sure that all business development and promotion projects are consistently addressing the target markets.

Long Term

- c. **Complete a comprehensive, ongoing market analysis for each Main Street community and the region.** Update all existing market information, compile and make it available in one central clearinghouse, ideally the Main Street office. Work with partners at ASU to standardize data collection instruments and format and to collect and analyze data, if necessary.

2. Business Improvement

Short Term

- a. **Complete or update the business inventory of all businesses in the Main Street districts.**
- b. **Triage existing businesses in each district.** This should be done confidentially, but it is important to identify:
 - “Star” businesses that are performing well
 - Businesses that are needed in the district but are struggling and need assistance, or are not performing at their complete potential
 - Successful businesses that are not appropriate for prime retail space
 - Marginal businesses that are not doing well
 - Marginal businesses that for some reason are still “hanging on,” taking up prime space
 - Businesses that may need to transition within the next year or two—for example, if the owner is nearing retirement age
- c. **Compile a list of “Best Practices” from the “star” businesses in the Delta.** This can be shared with other communities.
- d. **Create a data base of business resources and consultants and match them with business needs.**
 - From the business surveys, identify the needs of individual businesses and talk to them about services and resources that are available.
 - Use the services of the Main Street Arkansas business specialist and interior designer on a regular basis. Particular needs seem to be in areas of window display, visual merchandising, and inventory selection and control.
 - Identify specific needs of minority-owned businesses and work with them to improve business management practices. Work through key leadership of minority and ethnic groups to make sure that the assistance will be well received.
 - Assist businesses with web site design and development.
- e. **Prepare businesses for cultural heritage tourism.**
 - *See recommendations on hospitality training in the Cultural Heritage Tourism section.*
 - Inventory all businesses to determine what types of souvenirs and local products are sold in the community. Identify opportunities to upgrade the souvenir selection and provide for wider placement of locally produced items.
- f. As part of the “Delta Diamond” project, develop an **Awards for Excellence program** that rewards excellent customer service and business practices.



Long Term

- g. **Formalize a regional business assistance and consulting team** that can offer services to businesses on an ongoing basis at reduced rates or pro bono. Partner with the Chamber, SCORE, the Small Business Development Centers, and colleges and universities to identify the best persons for the team.

3. Business Development

Short Term

- a. **Begin a program to recruit restaurateurs to Delta communities.**
 - Start with restaurants already in the region that might be interested in a downtown location.
 - Target Memphis or Little Rock restaurants that might be willing to open a second location.
 - Work with the Council of Independent Restaurants of America (CIRA) to become one of their pilot recruitment areas through the New England Culinary Institute. Identify other culinary schools in the region that might also be interested.
- b. **Develop and enhance downtown farmers' markets in each community.** Coordinate with the "DeltaMade" business branding program. (See below.)
- c. **Create a data base of all artists, artisans, craftspeople, and tradespeople currently doing business out of their homes.** Centralize the data base and make it available to everyone in the region. This could be an excellent partnership project with the Delta Cultural Center and/or an internship project for an ASU student.
- d. **Identify existing scholarships (or develop new ones) for potential entrepreneurs to attend classes offered at area community colleges.**



Long Term

- e. **Create a regional revolving Delta Loan Program for business start-up and expansion.** Identify other financial or soft cost incentives that can be used for undercapitalized businesses that need to get on their feet. Incentives might include rent, utility, and marketing subsidies. Set up micro-loan programs that can be used for business inventory.
 - Work with the Building Trades Institute to provide needed physical repairs and improvements for businesses that are negatively impacted by their buildings.
 - Set up a program with accounting and legal firms in the region to allocate several days of pro bono services annually to the Delta Initiative businesses.
- f. **Set up certified "Delta Kitchens" in a downtown building in each community where local cooks can prepare, package, and market their products.** Work with the State

Department of Agriculture, Farm Bureaus and Extension Offices, and local Health Departments to develop criteria for the program.

- g. **Set up a formal entrepreneur development program for the Delta.** Work with the university and community colleges on curriculum development and certification. Target young people, as well as those on the home-based business data base.
 - Identify artisans and crafters who would be interested in potential live-work or studio-gallery space in the downtown. Help them secure space and make needed property improvements.
- h. **Encourage the development of bed and breakfasts and other unique lodging in or adjacent to the downtown districts.** Work with the State B&B Association to offer a training course in the region. Visit the Union Square Guest Quarters in El Dorado to see a model for short-term accommodations in upper stories.
 - *Short term in Helena:* Aggressively recruit a B&B operator for the business currently for sale.
- i. **Work with area high schools to target alumni with a Business Opportunity campaign.** Send out periodic post cards or e-mail when opportunities become available. Host tours of downtown buildings during class reunion weekends (with a fun party afterwards, of course!).
- j. **Work with local industries to identify opportunities for downtown retail outlets.** An example would be an American Greeting card shop in Osceola, which could also serve as a museum-type shop on the history of card making in America, as well as a place where people could make their own cards.

4. Branded Image for Local Products

Short Term

- a. **Create a “DeltaMade” branding program for items produced in the Delta.** Use a graphic designer to create an attractive logo for the sticker and tag that goes on the products and a “We Carry DeltaMade Products!” decal for participating shops and restaurants. Set up criteria for quality control of products. Except in rare instances, limit the brand to unique items not mass-merchandised or carried in big box discount stores.

Long Term

- b. **Create an annual DeltaMade shopping catalogue.**
- c. **Create a DeltaMade web site that allows on-line purchasing.** Link with other state and regional retail and tourism sites.
- d. **Develop a DeltaMade flagship retail outlet.** Explore the feasibility of franchising the business throughout the state.

5. Linked Marketing and Promotion

Short Term

- a. **Create a simple rack card flyer**, “Distinctive Shopping & Dining in the Delta,” that can be used to guide visitors to the places you want people to see. Develop criteria for being listed on the guide. *(See related recommendations under Cultural Heritage Tourism.)*
- b. **Create a “Dining in the Delta” restaurant guide for independent, locally owned restaurants.** Feature local and regional cuisine.
- c. **Encourage business-to-business marketing.**
Make the regional business inventory and data base available to all communities. Host a “B2B” workshop to give businesses ideas on how to take advantage of opportunities with other businesses in the region. (For example, a frame shop might be able to offer a rotating corporate art program to banks and large corporations.)



Long Term

- d. **Along with development of the DeltaMade web site, develop a shopping and dining page for the regional site that can provide links back to individual businesses.**
- e. **Develop an ongoing campaign to place feature stories about Delta businesses in state, regional, and national business publications.** Work with students in professional writing programs at the university to send out queries and write the articles. Feature testimonials from local business owners.



SECTION IV: HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

The successful revitalization of Main Street and historic commercial districts is directly connected to the revitalization of its adjacent neighborhoods. Adjacent neighborhoods produce disposable income that can directly benefit main street businesses. Furthermore, perceptions of adjacent neighborhoods have an impact on the image of the downtown district and its ability to attract customers and recruit businesses.

In the Arkansas Delta, neighborhood revitalization is a critical component of overall economic revitalization, primarily because of the depressed economy throughout the region.

OBSERVATIONS



There is a need for housing redevelopment partners. Interviews in all five cities support the viability of downtown housing in upper stories, as well as the need to improve the housing stock in adjacent residential communities.

However, Main Street organizations are not currently staffed for neighborhood housing development, nor should that be their primary mission at this time. Main Street organizations should identify housing development partners to address the housing needs in surrounding neighborhoods.

It is important that the Main Street organizations serve as facilitators for downtown housing development by identifying area developers (both nonprofit and for profit) and matching them up with project opportunities. The Main Street organizations should gradually develop the capacity to develop housing in their downtowns as a way to spur on investment, generate income, and attract residents to downtown to support the retail businesses. Homebuyers and renters typically move into revitalized neighborhoods before the retail services providers.

Once human resources are identified they can be utilized in a few of the following ways.

- **Marketer of local development opportunities.** This involves looking for development opportunities (site by site or building by building), doing feasibility analysis on each potential project, packaging and marketing these opportunities to developers. The staff will serve as a facilitator/matchmaker with the property owners. Try to avoid developers who are only interested in purchasing property at low cost and “holding-out” until they see an opportunity to sell without making any improvements to the property.
- **Developer of real estate.** In this case the identified partner will identify the opportunities, do the project feasibility analysis and assemble the necessary financial and human resource to make the project happen. This also includes leasing/managing or selling the end product.
- **Partner to develop real estate.** In this case the organization will assemble a partnership that brings together the necessary resources to make the project happen. The organization may bring

land and/or buildings to the partnership while the other partner may bring the financials and capacity to develop the real estate. Each partner brings resources and each partner shares in the benefits of the project.

There are limited funding sources for housing and economic development. Funding and other types of economic incentives are both limited and, in some cases, untapped and underutilized. Many property owners either are not aware of incentives or do not know how to take advantage of them.

There is widespread lack of master planning for Main Street and surrounding neighborhoods. This is the case in most of the smaller Delta communities; West Memphis does have a master plan, facilitated by the city's planning department. Preservation-based planning as a tool for economic development is addressed in Section V.

Mixed-use development (retail on first floor, with office or housing above) should be encouraged in the commercial districts.

Façade and property improvements are needed both in the central business districts and in the neighborhoods. There are excellent examples of rehabilitated buildings throughout the region, but property improvement efforts need to be aggressive and ongoing. Communities need to begin with general clean-up and maintenance of properties—both private and public—and move to more extensive work on façades. The problem of absentee ownership of deteriorating properties is an issue often cited as an obstacle, and this needs to be addressed. The condition of properties—both commercial and residential—is most dire in Helena, where many buildings are crumbling.

Real estate development opportunities need to be promoted strongly. Each community needs a data base of available rental space, and opportunities to develop or invest need to be matched with potential developers. Marketing should begin locally, then gradually branch out to the region and beyond as the region's economic and business conditions improve.

Strive for a balance in housing stock. Housing in downtown and adjacent neighborhoods should be a combination of ownership and rental, market-rate and affordable. Homeownership will create a greater sense of community, attract committed and involved residents, and will possibly bring a higher spending/buying power per household to support local retail businesses. Lofts above retail spaces could prove to be great rental properties for investors and great housing options, particularly for families without children. In some cases lofts can be developed as condos for those that chose to own instead of rent.

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Information Gathering

Short Term

- a. **Collect baseline real estate data** (i.e., vacancy rates, vacant structures, housing conditions, types and number of businesses, ownership/rental ratios, etc). This information will prove useful in measuring change and effectiveness of redevelopment efforts. This should be done for all properties in the Main Street district initially; eventually you will also want to have the same information for targeted adjacent residential neighborhoods, gathered either by Main Street or by some other entity.

- b. **Create a Space for Lease data base**, identifying rental rates, available square footage, condition of building, required tenant improvements, lease terms, and contact information for property owners and managers.
- c. **Create a Development Opportunity data base.** This data base will provide prices, cost per square foot, sales comps, rental comps, market analysis, owner contact information, feasibility analysis, local lenders, local appraiser, vacancy rates, sample pro forma, building conditions, plans, photos, sample development agreements, potential funding source, and other pertinent information.
- d. **Develop a data base of property owners in adjacent neighborhoods.** This may already be available from county or municipal records. Main Street needs to have access to this list in order to communicate with property owners.

Long Term

- e. **Complete a comprehensive market analysis for the region.** Update existing information, and standardize information among the communities (using the same format for displaying demographics, similar survey instruments, etc.). This information will be needed for business development as well as property development efforts. Work with ASU to make sure the analysis accurately reflects the dynamics of the Delta region and to keep it updated.

2. Partnership Development

Short Term

- a. **Identify strategic partnerships** to help with the revitalization of adjacent neighborhoods and with upper-story housing in downtown.
 - Create a partnership contact sheet. This is a comprehensive list of companies, organizations, and agencies that could be potential collaborative partners in the continued revitalization efforts. A list of potential partners is provided in Section VIII.
 - Host a meeting with key partners to discuss housing issues, identify needs, and gain buy-in for working together. Be sure to include key economic development entities, such as the Chamber, even if they are not directly involved with housing development.
- b. **Define Main Street's role in housing.** Developing housing on or adjacent to Main Streets will require focused human resources. There are three options that the Delta communities can explore to help build capacity to facilitate housing development in the region.
 - Hire a part-time real estate development project manager.
 - Find a board or committee volunteer who can serve as a development project manager.
 - Find a community partner, with a mission that includes housing development. Collaborate with the partner to work in your target areas.

Long Term

- c. **Identify organizations that have the capacity to take the lead on housing development, including financing development projects if needed.** If the capacity is not there, then work with the National Trust's Community Revitalization Department to develop the capacity of

non-profit organizations in the region to implement housing projects in historic neighborhoods.

3. Funding and Financial Incentives

Short Term

- a. **Create a funding incentive matrix.** This chart will identify all sources of regional, state, federal and local foundation funds, tax credits, and other incentives for housing and economic development with contact information, funding deadlines, and allowable uses of resources. The chart will be used to facilitate and develop projects.
- b. **Assemble a team of accountants to donate one or two days annually to assist property owners with tax credit applications.**
- c. **Offer two regional workshops to provide information on financial tools.**
 - A regional tax credit workshop, which outlines the tax credit process and the benefits of using historic tax credits, low-income housing credits, New Markets Tax Credits, and other products.
 - A “how-to” workshop that provides information on loans and lending products and leads organizations through the steps in creating revolving loan funds.



Long Term

- d. **Assemble a team of accountants to donate one or two days annually to assist property owners with tax credit applications.**
- e. **Identify and develop additional sources of gap financing to facilitate property acquisition and development.** Initial upper-story housing projects may need to be subsidized until opportunities become attractive to developers. Develop revolving loans and other lending products if needed.

4. Marketing Development Opportunities

Short Term

- a. **Host a tour of upper-story spaces, both finished (if available) and raw space.** Invite key civic leaders, developers, bankers, and real estate professionals. End the tour with a reception (with food and music, of course!) to provide an opportunity for networking. Many Main Street communities (e.g., Cordell OK, and Springfield IL) can serve as resources for this event.

Long Term

- b. **Prepare a real estate development opportunity marketing kit/program.** This should include a combination of booklets, tours, photos, and internet.

5. Property Improvement and Development

Short Term

- a. **Sponsor a coordinated regional Cleanup Day each fall and spring.** Invite all groups and entities in the community to participate. Target one building on that day for a quick painting and rehab, done by volunteer teams. Consider a “Junk Funeral” for major eyesores.
- b. **Initiate an Adopt-a-Block campaign** in each Main Street district, with local businesses and property owners in partnership with corporations and agencies. Present awards for creative cleanup, fix-up initiatives.
- c. **Work with the city and not-for-profit agencies to combat ongoing problems with public trash and litter.** Insist on enforcement of existing ordinances.
- d. **Implement façade improvements programs.** Provide matching grants for eligible projects, to include paint and awnings, as well as more substantial rehabilitation.

Long Term

- e. **Help organizations develop the capacity or facilitate the development of real estate in downtown.** Sponsor a Community Initiated Development (CID) workshop for property development partners.
- f. **Work with the Preservation Building Trades program** to develop teams of building rehabilitation craftsmen, laborers, and interns who can work pro bono or at reduced rates on endangered buildings.
- g. **Gain control of key properties.** The Main Street organization should serve as a partner/facilitator (or as developer, if the capacity and resources are there) in acquiring and developing downtown property for mixed-used. Property owner buy-in and/or site control are important to successful development of downtown and neighborhood properties.

See additional recommendations for downtown and adjacent residential neighborhood improvements in Section V, Design and Preservation.



SECTION V: DESIGN AND PRESERVATION PLANNING

The distinctive, historic physical character of a community is a key factor in its ability to:

- Be an attractive destination for tourists and visitors;
- Position itself to attract business and industry; and
- Be a desirable location for retirees and others who are relocating.

Many of the other recommendations in this report will not be fully successful unless more emphasis is placed on preservation-based tools that help make a place more beautiful and more livable. These tools are an important component of a comprehensive economic revitalization plan for the entire region, but particularly in the historic Main Street commercial districts.



The historic buildings and public spaces of a traditional commercial district enrich civic life and add value—on many levels—to the community. Main Street programs that have embraced a strong historic preservation ethic are successful in saving, rehabilitating, and finding new uses for traditional commercial buildings and in intensifying the uses of the district's buildings, through both specific building improvement projects and through policy and regulatory changes that make it easier to develop property within the commercial district.

Historic preservation involves not only the process of rehabilitating, restoring, or renovating older commercial buildings but also the process of adopting planning and land-use policies. These policies encourage full use of existing commercial centers before new development takes place, removing regulatory and other barriers that sometimes make attracting investment to historic commercial districts difficult.

OBSERVATIONS

Many historic structures—both commercial and residential—have been neglected and are in serious need of maintenance and rehabilitation. This is true throughout the region but particularly in Helena, where the situation is most acute. (See related observations and recommendations in Section IV, Housing and Neighborhood Revitalization.)

Overall, there is a serious lack of master planning. The City of West Memphis has a very knowledgeable and responsive planning department, but in other towns, the master plans are non-existent, outdated, or fail to address the distinct needs and complexities of the historic downtown district. Land-use and building-use plans that recognize downtown as a context-sensitive place need to be put into effect.

Lack of planning has resulted in overbuilt office and retail space and has encouraged sprawl. When there is no comprehensive master plan to guide land use, development tends to be driven by the needs of big box stores and strip developers. This tends to occur in a vacuum, with little regard for hidden

costs of additional infrastructure required or for the impact on other properties and businesses in town. The irony is that this type of generic development—when it results in disinvestment in historic properties or the displacement of local businesses—is often, in the long term, an actual *detriment* rather than a boost to sustainable economic development.

KEY STRATEGIES

Strategies for preservation and planning work in Delta communities will be implemented in collaboration and partnership with the National Trust's Southwest Office in Fort Worth, which can offer a wide range of resources and technical consulting services.

1. Design and Preservation Education

Short Term

- a. **Host a “visual preference” workshop in each community for business and property owners.** Discuss elements of good design and how cost-effective improvements can be made.
 - In West Memphis, host an Architecture of the Recent Past workshop to help property owners understand and appreciate the special character of their buildings.
- b. **Develop design guidelines** for Main Street districts that do not already have them in place. Standardize guidelines as much as possible for all Delta communities. Include sign and streetscape guidelines.
- c. **Recognize design improvements** through press releases and a regional awards program (the Delta Diamond Awards).
- d. **Plan a regional Delta celebration of National Historic Preservation Week next May.** Commission a Delta poster for the event and special press kits. You may want to do this in conjunction with the design workshops and the presentation of design awards, as well as other promotions and activities.
- e. **Use Osceola’s “Back to School Splash” as a model program** to support the education of at-risk youth and at the same time, teach local youth about their local heritage. Osceola offers an event before school starts where school supplies are offered for free to needy local youth. As a part of this event, a treasure hunt is held with a different heritage theme each year, and youth must discover the answers to questions about their local heritage as they compete for cash scholarship prizes.
- f. **Find out how local schools teach local history, and see if there is a way to get involved:**
 - Offer a tour of the historic downtown.
 - Display local history projects or artwork in a vacant storefront.



- Do a “history mystery” treasure hunt as part of National Preservation Week in May with cash prizes.
 - Engage African-Americans in their educational history. (Use the Rosenwald Schools initiative as a resource and model.)
- g. **Continue to provide scholarships for the National Main Streets Conference.** Delta representatives should submit a proposal to present a panel on the regional initiative for the May 2005 conference in Baltimore. Working with the conference theme, “Cool Cities: Old Buildings, New Attitudes,” propose something like, “We’ve Got a New Attitude . . . We’re Working Together!”

Long Term

- g. **Work with the school systems to develop a sequential preservation education curriculum for the public schools in Delta communities.** Review materials that other organizations have developed and customize materials for the Delta. Use South Carolina’s “Downtown as a Classroom” model to engage elementary and secondary students in preservation and community revitalization.
- h. **Provide annual scholarships for representatives of each community to attend the National Preservation Conference.**

2. Building Protection and Preservation

Short Term

- a. **Begin work on National Register nominations.** Work with the state Main Street architect to identify which additional properties or districts in town are eligible for the National Register. Include residential as well as commercial districts.

Downtown districts in Osceola and Helena are already on the National Register. Blytheville and Dumas may also want to pursue designation. West Memphis may be problematic, since there are many gaps along Broadway.



- Provide additional CLG training in Dumas and Helena. Make sure they know about their historic district designation and are taking full advantage of it. The National Trust’s Southwest Office can serve as faculty.
- b. **Work with municipal government on strict enforcement** of existing design review, historic district regulations, local ordinances, and building codes.
- c. **For Helena:**
- **Apply for Endangered Building and PSF grants, as appropriate.**

- **Consider nominating the town of Helena for the National Trust’s 2005 11 Most Endangered Places list.** Working through the Southwest Office, determine whether or not there is sufficient support for the nomination. The nomination would position Helena as representative of important physical fabric and cultural heritage in the Delta that will disappear if measures are not taken to preserve it.
- **Work with state officials to cut through bureaucracy and do whatever it takes to complete the “big ditch” project in the downtown.**

Long Term

- d. **Coordinate and host a preservation design charrette in Helena.** Invite nationally known architects, preservationists, and developers to work on preservation and development scenarios for Cherry and adjacent streets. Work in cooperation with the Building Trades Institute to create several hands-on working field experiences. Invite all Delta Initiative communities to participate in the charrette.
- e. **Create a regional design center similar to the Northwest Arkansas Community Design Center.** Work through ASU, the Delta Cultural Center, community colleges, and the BTI.
- f. **Work with municipal officials to enact demolition delay ordinances in each community.**

3. Preservation-Based Planning Tools

Short Term

- a. **Host a regional informational workshop on the benefits of establishing a Tax Increment Financing, Business Improvement District, Cultural Arts District, or other types of overlays.** A TIF district would be particularly useful in Osceola, which has a large number of underutilized buildings. A BID would be a useful tool to help fund “clean and safe” projects in West Memphis and other communities.
- b. **Conduct an “audit” of local policies, regulations, ordinances, zoning, and building codes to determine the extent to which they encourage preservation and revitalization in historic commercial and residential neighborhoods.** Provide sample ordinances that have been successful in other communities.



Long Term

- c. **Determine the feasibility of a Historic Retail Overlay District in Delta communities.** The overlay district would provide a mechanism for defining separate zoning regulations, regulatory relief where appropriate, tax abatement, and other incentives for property development and business location.
- d. **Work with local officials to develop and implement master plans for downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.** Include land-use, housing, and business cluster plans. Encourage mixed-use and mixed-income zoning and development.

- Use a community input planning process, such as the National Trust/NEA “Your Town” program, to allow for maximum community involvement.
- e. **Work with municipal, county, and state officials on a regional approach to planning and zoning for development in non-historic areas.** Identify policies that encourage development in historic commercial areas and the rehabilitation of historic neighborhoods. Require economic impact fees from big box developers and adherence to strict design guidelines for highway-oriented development.



SECTION VI: SHORT-TERM IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

As an outcome of the initial Assessment Phase of the Arkansas Delta Initiative, many of the short-term projects can be implemented with a minimum of additional resources. The assessment team recommends two strategies to move short-term implementation forward:

- Incorporate recommended activities and projects into the current Main Street work plans, as appropriate for each community.
- Work with established local and regional partners on activities and projects that are not appropriate for the Main Street work plan but can be accomplished by other entities.

Hold a work planning session to review the short-term recommendations and add them to FY05 committee work plans. The Delta Initiative project manager should facilitate these sessions. Make sure all work plans are written and detailed, including:

- Specific tasks associated with each project
- Timelines
- Assigned responsibilities
- Costs
- Potential funding sources

If a project needs to be implemented by a partnering entity, then set a meeting date to discuss the project and create a joint work plan. For optimum success in implementing short-term projects, work with partners with which you already have a good working relationship.

If neither the Main Street organization nor the partners have capacity to implement a project, then the project will need to be moved to the long-term list.

You may need to drop less important projects from the current work plan in order to make room for higher priority recommendations.

Short-Term Project Summary

The following chart summarizes the short-term recommendations from each section of this report. For the most part these are recommendations that can be implemented in FY05 without going substantially beyond the normal scope of services provided by Main Street Arkansas staff or the usual and customary contractual services provided by consultants. If additional financial resources are required, that is indicated below.

Recommendations for Main Street Arkansas staff services are included as examples of how the projects can be implemented successfully. Decisions and priorities relating to staff time will be made by Main Street Arkansas and the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

#	Project	Services/Resources
CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM		
1-a	Seasonal calendar of events	Promotion Committee work plan; Cary to coordinate, with tourism partners.
1-b	Shared marketing materials	Promotion Committee work plan, coordinated regionally. One promotion chair or volunteer to coordinate.
2-a	Tourism baseline data	ER Committee work plan; tourism partner to coordinate and distribute regional summary.
3-a	Event collaboration	Promotion Committee work plan; Cary and one promotion chair to coordinate.
4-a	Biking itineraries	Coordinated by regional tourism partners and bike clubs; promoted by Promotion Committee; one promotion chair to coordinate.
5-a	Support for Delta Heritage Tours in Helena	One day of heritage tourism consulting services.
SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT		
1-a	Business and consumer surveys	ER Committee work plans; coordinated by Cary; information sharing coordinated by one ER chair. (Coordinated with heritage tourism recommendation #2-a.)
1-b	Target market review	Board and joint committee meeting, perhaps at board retreat; coordinated by Cary.
2-a	Business inventory	ER committee work plan; joint regional inventory compiled and shared by one ER chair.
2-b	Business triage	ER committee work plan; session facilitated by Cary.
2-c	"Best Practices" summary	ER committee work plans; coordinated by one volunteer from each community; project chairs serve as regional task force to compile and share summary; Mark Miller to coordinate.
2-d	Business resource data base and business consulting assistance	ER committee work plans, with shared regional summary; coordinated by Mark Miller, assisted by Keri Sengali. Outside consulting services as needed.
2-e	Tourism-related business assistance	One-day "Business of Tourism" regional workshop; business inventory on ER Committee work plan.
2-f	Diamond Awards for Customer Service	Promotion Committee work plan; facilitated by Cary; regional PR coordinated by one PR Committee chair.

3-a	Restaurant recruitment	ER committee work plan; Cary to coordinate; Valecia to coordinate with CIRA.
3-b	Farmers' market development	ER committee work plan; one-day farmers' market consulting workshop; Cary to coordinate, in collaboration with state Department of Agriculture.
3-c	Home-based business data base	ER Committee work plan; Cary to coordinate; one ER chair to coordinate regional list.
3-d	Entrepreneur scholarships	Organization Committee to coordinate, in cooperation with local universities and colleges; one OR chair to coordinate regional PR.
4-a	DeltaMade branding program	Promotion Committee and ER work plans; Cary and Mark Miller to coordinate; contracted professional services necessary.
5-a	Cross-promotion flyer	Promotion Committee work plan; Cary to coordinate; one Promotion Committee chair to coordinate regional effort.
5-b	Dining guide	Promotion Committee work plan; Cary to coordinate; one Promotion Committee chair to coordinate regional effort.
5-c	Business-to-business marketing	Promotion and ER Committee work plans; coordinated by Mark Miller; one ER chair to coordinate regional effort.
HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION		
1-a	Baseline data collection	ER Committee work plans; Mark Miller to coordinate, in partnership with area universities and colleges; Mark to coordinate regional information.
1-b	Space inventory	ER Committee work plans; Cary to coordinate; one ER chair to coordinate regionally.
1-c	Opportunity data base	ER Committee work plans; Cary to coordinate; one ER chair to coordinate regionally.
1-d	Property owner data base	ER Committee work plans; Cary to coordinate; one ER chair to coordinate regionally.
2-a	Housing partner identification	ER Committee work plans; housing subcommittee chair to coordinate; oversight by Cary and executive director.
2-b	Defining Main Street's role in housing	Discussion at ER Committee and board levels; Cary and executive director to coordinate.

3-a	Funding matrix	ER Committee work plans; Cary and Daniel to coordinate and provide consulting support.
3-b	Financing information workshops	ER Committee work plans; Cary and Daniel to coordinate and provide consulting support; Nancy Lowe to assist.
3-c	Tax credit application assistance	ER Committee work plans; executive directors and boards to coordinate local and regional lists.
4-a	Upper-story space tour	Design, ER, and Promotion Committee work plans, one chair to take lead; one chair to coordinate regional publicity.
5-a	Clean-up Day	Design Committee work plans; one chair to coordinate regional publicity.
5-b	Adopt-a-Block campaign	Design Committee work plans; one non-profit partner agency to chair and coordinate regional publicity.
5-c	Trash/litter enforcement	Design Committee work plans; volunteer to coordinate with city.
5-d	Façade improvement program	Design and ER Committee work plans; Cary, Nancy, and Daniel to coordinate, with strong city participation.
DESIGN AND PRESERVATION PLANNING		
1-a	Design workshops	Design Committee work plans; Nancy Lowe to coordinate.
1-b	Design guidelines	Design Committee work plans; Nancy Lowe and Daniel Cary to coordinate.
1-c	Design awards	Design or Organization Committee work plans; Nancy Lowe and Daniel Cary to coordinate.
1-d	Preservation Week celebration	Design Committee work plans; Cary and Marian to coordinate regional and statewide publicity.
1-e	Back-to-School Splash	Joint Design and Promotion Committee project; Cary to coordinate; one Promotion chair to coordinate regional publicity.
1-f	Local school involvement	Design Committee work plans; subcommittee volunteer and local school partner to coordinate; one volunteer to coordinate regional publicity.
2-d	Conference scholarships	Marian to coordinate.
2-a	National Register nominations	Design Committee work plans; Daniel and Nancy Lowe to coordinate.

2-b	Code enforcement	Design Committee work plans; Cary and executive director to coordinate, with committee volunteer.
2-c	Intervention in Helena	Design Committee work plans; Daniel and Cary to coordinate.
3-a	Overlay district workshop	Design and Organization Committee work plans; Cary and Daniel to coordinate.
3-b	Local policy audit	Design Committee work plans; Daniel and Cary to coordinate; consulting assistance needed.

Critical Projects

In addition to the projects on the short-term list above, the assessment team identified one or two critical projects in each community that need to be completed as soon as possible. These projects are important not only for restoring economic vitality but also for establishing credibility for the Main Street organization's capacity to implement and sustain a long-term regional effort.



The recommended critical projects are:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Blytheville | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Renovation and use of the bus depot 2. Completed renovation and occupancy of the Kresge Building |
| Dumas | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Restoration of the gin property and lot 2. Establishment of a vibrant farmers' market on the gin lot |
| Helena | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stabilization and mothballing of several endangered buildings 2. Joint initiative with the Building Trades Institute |
| Osceola | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of the Borum building for first floor retail and upper-story housing |
| West Memphis | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rejuvenation of Blues on Broadway as a regular evening event 2. Successful implementation of the Hogs & Dogs Event |

Even though several of these projects have implementation timelines that are longer than one year, phased-in work should begin immediately, and this should also be included as a high-priority project on the work plan.



SECTION VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PHASE II

Phase II of the Arkansas Delta Initiative involves longer-term, larger-scale projects and a comprehensive program of work that will require a substantial amount of additional resources to be devoted to the project from multiple sources. It will also require additional partnerships.

Moving ahead with Phase II is important in order to achieve any significant degree of sustainable economic revitalization in a region as challenging as the Delta. After reviewing this report, state staff will need to decide which recommendations to adopt and how to proceed with the long-term implementation plan.

Phase II services will be designed by a collaborative team led by Main Street Arkansas staff, the Delta Initiative project manager, Delta Main Street executive directors, the Southwest Office of the National Trust, and directors of the Trust's Heritage Tourism Program and the State and Local Partners Program.



National, state, and local entities will all collaborate to identify potential sources of funding and other resources needed to carry the Initiative forward.

The National Trust and Department of Arkansas Heritage should begin now to identify potential sources of funding from government sources and non-profit and corporate foundations that fund rural revitalization efforts. Delta communities should also realize that they are responsible for securing a local financial match and for helping identify and secure additional sources of funding.

The services recommended below should be viewed as an integrated package rather than stand-alone consultations. Costs are estimated at this point. More precise budget figures will be determined by the exact scope and length of services and the consultants and other personnel needed on site.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

For the National Trust

1. **Coordinate through the Southwest Office.** The Southwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation should be the key link at the national level, work in collaboration with other Trust departments and in close coordination with the Main Street Arkansas project manager on all phases of implementation.
2. **Designate as strategic site.** The Arkansas Delta Initiative should be considered by the National Trust's Department of Community Revitalization for designation as a strategic services demonstration site, for more closely focused services from National Main Street and Community Partners.

3. **Consider 11 Most nomination.** As noted below, the Trust should consider Helena for the 2005 Eleven Most Endangered Places listing.
4. **Promote the BTI.** Through a separate initiative, the National Trust for Historic Preservation should be engaged as a partner to help provide marketing assistance for the Building Trades Institute in Helena.
5. **Develop local preservation partnerships.** Through the National Trust's Partners Program, encourage support for the Delta Initiative through the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas. Begin work toward the long-term goal of a local preservation partner organization in the Delta.

For Main Street Arkansas

6. **Designate a project manager for the Initiative.** It has been assumed that Assistant State Coordinator Cary Tyson will serve in this capacity, but this decision needs to be reviewed in light of the recommendations in this report. The assessment team feels that Cary is well suited for the job and has the necessary skills to take the initiative forward, but the Main Street Arkansas staff needs to make the final decision.
7. **Review other work loads.** Main Street Arkansas will also need to review the work load of other staff members to determine the reasonable amount of time that they can expect to allocate to the Delta Initiative. (For example, services of the small business specialist and the interior designer are very much needed in the Delta. If they are not able to devote a significant amount of time to working in those communities, then outside consultants will need to be hired.)
8. **Meet jointly with representatives from each community to discuss the entire assessment report.** Identify important questions and concerns.
9. **Develop a set of benchmarks and measurements for tracking progress of the Delta Initiative Plan and recommended projects.** These should be compiled for individual communities and for the region, and should include but not be limited to:
 - Documentation of beginning baseline data;
 - Economic reinvestment figures in private and public properties;
 - Investment in public infrastructure;
 - Business and job creation figures;
 - Tracking of local business development and expansion;
 - Local product export figures;
 - Housing units created and rehabilitated, owner/rental occupancy figures;
 - Heritage tourism attraction and economic impact figures;
 - Impact on local tax bases;
 - Demographic information (population, age, household income, education levels);
 - Preservation and planning tools use, local ordinances established;
 - Staff, professional, and volunteer hours allocated to projects;
 - Project completion ratios;

- Documentation of project impact; and
- Photographs, written and multi-media materials associated with each project.

10. Share the Delta Initiative report with state officials and key regional and state partners to gain their support for moving forward.

11. Be resolute in enforcing participation requirements for communities. This needs to be, at minimum, a “three strikes and you’re out” policy on attendance at workshops and training, meeting reporting deadlines, completing projects, and other important requirements. State resources would be better spent working with only one or two communities than with communities who are only partially committed.

For local communities

12. Sign a letter of commitment to work toward implementation of appropriate Phase I recommendations from this report. (It is recognized that each community will not be able to—or may not need to—implement every recommendation, only those appropriate and high priority for the community.) In addition, this commitment will include:

- Allocation of all DTR money to façade projects (or other high-priority recommendations from the report);
- An intensive year-end program review that includes a progress report on the Delta projects;
- Baseline and data reporting, tracking progress and measuring impact, in addition to the monthly reporting currently required by Main Street Arkansas;
- Support from municipal government for appropriate Delta Initiative recommendations;
- Attendance at quarterly executive director coordination meetings, rotating locations among the five communities.
- Attendance at required training.

This commitment is in addition to the commitments already required from designated Arkansas Main Street communities.

13. Recognize the full-time, multi-year commitment that will be required. This is a comprehensive and ambitious scope of work. The executive director will need to be focused and have complete support of the Main Street board and the municipality. In the case of Dumas, this will require a full-time staff person.

PHASE II SERVICES:

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage Tourism Reconnaissance Visits

Building on the initial four-hour visits, complete an in-depth two-day visit in each Main Street community to explore local heritage tourism options. Visits will include detailed recommendations for individual sites, communities, and the region.

Estimated cost: \$15,000-25,000

Delta Tourism Product Development

Provide assistance with the development of specific tourism products for the Delta such as:

- walking and driving tour materials (brochures, booklets, audio tours)
- specialized group tour development
- assistance with coordinated interpretive exhibits at museums and sites.

The Delta Cultural Center could be a partner for this component.

Estimated cost: Will vary.

"Delta Diamond" Hospitality Program

Building on existing hospitality training resources, create a "Delta Diamond" program with elements that include engaging curriculum materials for elementary schools; creative and customized hospitality and customer service training for Delta high schools, work force training programs, and front line employees; and a community awareness and pride-building program.

Estimated cost: \$30,000-60,000

Delta Image Campaign

A region-wide image campaign to change the perceptions of the Delta.

Estimated cost: Will vary

Regional Training Workshops on Tourism-related Topics

A selection of day-long workshops hosted in Delta Main Street communities that will be open to a regional audience. Each community can select training workshops that would be most appropriate for their needs. Potential topics could include:

- Creative Strategies to Make Sites Come Alive (interpretation)
- Tapping into the Group Tour Market
- Hospitality Training (Delta Diamond)
- Packaging and Partnerships
- Marketing on a Shoestring

Estimated cost: \$5,000/workshop

Scenic Byway Experience

Create a cohesive experience in the Delta for the individual traveler using the Great River Road Scenic Byway. Seek funding through the National Scenic Byway Program (building on the \$25,000 NSB grant in 2003 for implementation of the corridor management plan for the Great River Road). Partner with a local university such as Arkansas State University to provide students to assist with research and inventory work. This project should include a detailed assessment, a gap analysis, quantitative and qualitative market research, recommended interpretive themes and strategies (linked to the larger Great River Road experiences in all 10 states).

Estimated cost:
Planning phase: \$75,000-150,000
Implementation phase: \$100,000-250,000

Special Event Management Workshop/Consultation

This two-day workshop by a national event management consultant will deal with all aspects of event management and sponsorship sales. Will also include separate consultation for major events in each community.

Estimated cost: \$7,500

SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Comprehensive Market Analysis

This includes a review and update of all existing market information; development of additional survey instruments; data collection and analysis where needed; presentation of findings in a regional workshop setting, with discussion of how material can be put to use. Will include psychographic as well as demographic information. Delivered by national consultant and regional university personnel.

Estimated costs: \$20,000 - \$40,000
Less if students are used

"Delta Kitchens"

Health Department-certified "Delta Kitchens" will be set up in each community so that specialty food producers have a centralized location to prepare, package, and market products. Services delivered by national and local consultants.

Estimated costs:
Consulting phase: \$10,000
Planning and development costs will vary

"DeltaMade" Product Branding Program

This is a three-phase program: Phase one includes initial consulting services, setting up criteria for quality control, identification of local producers and products, start-up producer training, and the creation of brand graphics. Phase two involves product placement and initial local marketing. Phase three involves regional marketing, including catalogue and web site development, and retail outlet start-up. Comprehensive service delivered by National Trust Community Revitalization staff, graphic designers, and other marketing professionals.

Estimated costs:
Phases one and two, \$75,000-\$100,000
Phase three, unknown

Entrepreneurship Program

A formal entrepreneurship program will include curriculum development, materials development, course work and training, and certification. It will be fully integrated with entrepreneur training for artisans and

crafters and for the hospitality industry. May be able to customize programs already in place at area universities and colleges. Services delivered by National Trust staff, consultants, and regional university staff.

Estimated costs: Unknown

Ongoing Retail Business Consulting

This will provide one-on-one consulting services from a national retail consultant.

Estimated cost: \$25,000 annually

HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION/ PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

Housing and Property Reconnaissance Visits

Following up on initial reconnaissance during the assessment visit, these in-depth, two-day visits in each community will assess existing housing conditions and organizational capacity; and determine the potential for property development financing mechanisms needed. Can be combined with informational workshops. Services delivered by Southwest Office and National Trust Community Revitalization staff.

Estimated cost: \$15,000-\$25,000

Informational Workshops on Financing Tools

Two regional workshops will present information on use of tax credits and how to set up revolving loan programs. Presented by Southwest Office and Community Revitalization staff.

Estimated cost: \$5,000

Community-initiated Development Workshop (CID)

This two-and-a-half day workshop customized for the Delta will lead community teams step-by-step through the non-profit development process. Led by Donovan Rypkema, national property development consultant.

Estimated cost: \$10,000

Building Consultations

A national property development consultant will provide three one-day property development consultations on the gin property in Dumas, bus station/Kresge properties in Blytheville, and the corner square property in Osceola.

Estimated cost: \$7,500

Delta Equity Fund

This fund will allow area not-for-profit organizations to gain control of important properties or help develop key business opportunities.

Estimated start-up funding: \$75,000

DESIGN AND PRESERVATION

Preservation and Heritage Education Curriculum Development

This will be an ongoing program that begins with several grades and gradually moves toward a K thru 12 program, drawing from the curricula already in use and customizing for the Delta. Will also include teacher education workshops. Coordinated by Southwest Office.

Estimated costs: Will vary

National Trust Conference Scholarships

This will provide annual scholarships for representatives of each community to attend the National Preservation Conference.

Estimated cost: \$2,500

Helena Preservation Charrette

This four-day charrette will focus on building stabilization and rehabilitation; housing and neighborhood revitalization; financing mechanisms for property development; and zoning, code, and ordinances. Consulting team will include nationally known architects, preservationists, building contractors, developers, and community revitalization consultants; university and college interns will also participate. Will include hands-on field experiences in cooperation with the Building Trades Institute. Coordinated by the Southwest Office.

Estimated cost: \$30,000-\$50,000

Consultation on Master Planning

This will include consultation with each municipality on comprehensive land-use planning; includes zoning and ordinance review, plan development if necessary; context-sensitive planning for historic and Main Street districts. Services delivered by National Trust's Southwest Office and Community Revitalization staff.

Estimated costs: \$15,000-\$40,000

BEYOND PHASE II

Each service in the implementation plan will have benchmarks and measurement tools for tracking progress and economic impact.

Based on established success indicators, consultants and state Main Street staff will determine which strategies of the Mississippi Delta Project have been effective in assisting with the economic revitalization of the region. Main Street Arkansas will publish a white paper outlining the project and documenting its successes. This will be Phase III of the project.

Phase IV will involve outlining and detailing a replicable preservation-based rural revitalization model that can be used in other regions of Arkansas and throughout the country. State staff and consultants will make presentations at nationwide conferences and disseminate the model as an example of successful leveraging of resources for rural revitalization.



SECTION VIII: RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Arkansas Delta Initiative is more likely to succeed if it is a true collaboration of public and private interests with local, state, regional, and national expertise and perspectives. The partial listing of resources and potential partners for the Initiative below includes a full description of a number of important resources in the state, followed by a list of other entities and organizations that should be involved in the implementation plan. This list will grow as the initiative evolves.

ARKANSAS RESOURCES

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville's Community Design Center

<http://www.uark.edu/depts/uacdc/>

Established in 1995, with the generous support of the Harvey and Bernice Jones Family Foundation, the **University of Arkansas Community Design Center** has already provided community planning and design services to more than 30 clients and communities throughout the state. Many small towns and cities in Arkansas have neither the resources nor the personnel available to undertake comprehensive planning or urban design studies. UACDC is committed to providing this important public service, assisting communities in identifying and prioritizing civic projects which are then carried out by the appropriate design professionals. In this respect, the Center serves as an advocate for municipalities with a demonstrated interest in maintaining the quality and character of their historic downtown areas. In addition, the Center promotes zoning and legislative measures designed to counter horizontal sprawl and encourage open space preservation near urban centers.

While the principal client base of the Center has been Arkansas municipal governments, which UACDC has been prepared to serve, we have also provided planning services to other client groups, since they too are in the public interest. These include civic organizations, Main Street Arkansas, farm families with an interest in far-sighted land development, church groups, and similar nonprofit entities. The Center will not, however, undertake any specific planning or architectural projects where it is evident that appropriate design professionals are available.

The Center has never solicited work nor answered Request for Qualification announcements for public planning or design work. All of the projects of the Center have resulted from individual inquiries and are taken only where it is determined that planning studies being undertaken are in the long-range public interest and, more important, have substantial support for implementation. Although the Center employs the services of upper-level design students in carrying out assignments, it does not function as a purely academic research unit. Unless client groups can provide convincing evidence of commitment to civic investment and action, the Center will not undertake new commissions. Fortunately, since our inception, there has never been a period in which committed clients were not employing our services.

Arkansas Delta Byways

www.deltabyways.com

Arkansas Delta Byways is a non-profit tourism promotion association serving the 15 counties of Eastern Arkansas. Travel and tourism opportunities are promoted by a volunteer board that includes three representatives from each county. The board works with members of the association (including communities, chambers of commerce, advertising and promotion commissions, individual attractions, restaurants, lodging facilities, and others interested in tourism) to make visitors and residents alike aware of the wonderful heritage and culture of this region. All individuals and organizations interested in tourism in the Eastern Delta region are invited to become members of the association.

Delta Studies Center – Arkansas State University

P.O. Box 245, State University, AR 72467-0245

Among the Delta Studies Center's projects is African-American Heritage Tourism Component. The purpose of this study is to get information about the project along the Crowley's Ridge Parkway that will help to share the rich history and heritage of African-Americans in the Delta to further promote heritage tourism. It will incorporate the history of the region's African-American citizens, as well as establish the Crowley's Ridge Parkway Heritage Tourism Society. This project will provide internships related to the ongoing development and long-term management of the Crowley's Ridge Parkway corridor and providing possible long-term job placement opportunities for Arkansas State University students.

This project will benefit the Delta Communities along the parkway by: promoting the incorporation of a Crowley's Ridge African-American Tourism Society; identifying African-American sites and place historic markers along the ridge as a tourist attraction; and developing an interpretive museum and traveling exhibit about Scott W. Bond, noted African-American "ridge" entrepreneur and millionaire.

The project's funders are the Federal Highway Administration (DOT), the Arkansas Highway Transportation Department, and ASU.

Delta Center for Economic Development – Arkansas State University

The College of Business is the home of the Delta Center for Economic Development. The Center coordinates the economic development outreach services of the university and provides a coordinated and comprehensive approach to serving the businesses, governments, and citizens of the Arkansas Delta. The opportunity to create the new center came when a \$1,000,000 grant from the Economic Development of Arkansas Fund Commission was received. The Center has the task of bringing all current outreach services under one roof and adding new services that are appropriate for the Arkansas Delta.

The services range from A to Z or, in this case, from international trade assistance to training the current and future leaders of the Arkansas Delta. One traditional service is small business assistance provided through the Small Business Development Center and critical information and research services provided by the Small Business Administration's Business Information Center. The Business Information Center is the only such center currently located on a university campus in the nation.

- Professional Development and Workforce Training are key components to any economic development program.
- Regional Leadership training is offered through a nine-month program.
- Various economic research studies on issues such as economic impact analysis are available as well as expertise in providing forecast data for targeted areas.

- Transportation Management conducts studies for all transportation modes and provides many economic impact studies for the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department as well as the Corps of Engineers.

Arkansas State University's Ph.D. Program in Heritage Studies

The Heritage Studies doctoral degree is designed for individuals seeking senior positions in public institutions such as museums, libraries, and archives, historical societies and state parks, cultural tourist sites, community heritage programs, federal, state and local agencies, as well as in private consulting firms and heritage-related businesses.

The Heritage Studies program offers employment opportunities that include senior executive staff positions in cultural and historical agencies, parks and cultural tourism sites, historical societies, museums, archives, federal, state and local public and nonprofit agencies, and private consulting firms. Delta Main Street programs and/or the Delta Initiative could take advantage of the intellectual talent pool for interns, volunteers, or potential staff.

OTHER POTENTIAL RESOURCES AND PARTNERS

Arkansas Arts Council
Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism
Arkansas Humanities Council
Arkansas State University's Delta Blues Consortium
Delta Regional Authority
John Deere Foundation
Kellogg Foundation
National Endowment for the Arts
National Endowment for the Humanities
National Scenic Byway Program
Preserve America
Rural Funders Collaborative
United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development
Small Business Administration
Small Business Development Centers
Council of Independent Restaurants of America
Service Corp of Retired Executive (S.C.O.R.E.)
Community colleges
Southern Banking Development Corporation
Mississippi County Equal Opportunity Council
Arkansas State University's Delta Center
Federal Delta Commission

Building Trades Institute
Delta Cultural Center
Walton Family Foundation
Delta Regional Authority
Arkansas Delta Byways
Neighborhood and Community Economics
Rural Housing Development
Housing Authorities
Economic Development Commission
Area lenders
Local realtors
Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC)
Federal Home Loan Bank
Area hospitals
Area Community Development Corporations (Mid-Delta, Walnut CDC, etc)
Great River Economic Development Administration
Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Utility companies
Local school districts
Institute for Local Self-Reliance, newrules.org
Center for Southern Folklore



ARKANSAS DELTA INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT TEAM

Amy Jordan Webb has more than 18 years of hands-on experience working in cultural heritage tourism. Amy Webb joined the National Trust's Heritage Tourism Program in 1993 and has served as the program's director since 1995. In her capacity with the Heritage Tourism Program, Amy Webb works at the national level with Partners in Tourism, a coalition of national organizations and agencies, to create a better understanding and awareness of cultural and heritage tourism.

Ms. Webb spearheaded the *Share Your Heritage* initiative, a national program funded by American Express and the National Endowment for the Arts. *Share Your Heritage* includes success story publications, how-to cultural heritage tourism curriculum materials and workshops. She completed an 80-page publication of cultural heritage tourism success stories entitled *Share Your Heritage: Cultural Heritage Tourism Success Stories* and a companion 44-page publication of rural tourism success stories entitled *Stories Across America: Opportunities in Rural Tourism* in the fall of 2001.

Prior to working with the National Trust, she worked for eight years as the director of education and tourism for the Providence Preservation Society in Providence, Rhode Island. She holds a master's degree in architectural history and historic preservation from the University of Virginia and a bachelor's degree in architectural history from Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Her master's thesis focused on the interpretation of historic sites in America between 1850 and 1950.

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Lawrence Williamson is the Executive Director of CORE Neighborhood Revitalization Inc., a nonprofit housing and economic development corporation servicing neighborhoods located in the "core" of the City of Macon, Georgia. Mr. Williamson has 18 years of redevelopment experience in the public, private and nonprofit sectors. His experience includes architecture, real estate development (affordable housing, lofts, retail, and commercial) and economic development.

Prior to joining CORE, Lawrence was acting director of Economic Development for the Downtown Los Angeles Business Improvement District, regional manager with the Economic Development Corporation of Los Angeles County, a principal consultant with Urban Redevelopment Associates, a consulting and real estate development firm he established, and a real estate development project manager with the Los Angeles Community Design Center. He began his career with the City of Cincinnati where he worked for six years managing architectural and community revitalization projects.

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Valecia Crisafulli was small business development specialist for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center from May 2002 through June 2004. In that position she worked most closely with Main Street communities in Virginia, Arkansas, Connecticut, and Maryland. She has delivered numerous workshops and consulting services related to business retention and tourism-related business development. Previously she was executive director of Downtown Springfield, Inc., and the coordinator of the Illinois Main Street program from its inception in 1993 until 1999. She also co-chaired the task force that started Illinois' regional heritage tourism initiative.

Valecia has conducted many seminars and workshops on downtown revitalization, including presentations at state and national conferences on topics that range from organization to business development to heritage tourism and hospitality training. She is a former retail business owner and principal in a public relations and marketing firm. Ms. Crisafulli has a master's degree in humanities education from The Ohio State University.

She was recently named associate director, Statewide and Local Partnerships, at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a position she began on July 1.

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Cary Tyson is the assistant state coordinator for Main Street Arkansas and served as Project Manager for the Delta Initiative. Cary has been with Main Street Arkansas since October 2001. Prior to joining Main Street he served as the Certified Local Government coordinator for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. He was a member of the Arkansas Air National Guard from 1991-1997. Cary holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Cary is a graduate of the Preservation Leadership Institute and the Arkansas Public Administration Consortium's Arkansas Governmental Manager and Certified Public Manager Programs.

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Daniel Carey has been the Director of the Southwest Office since July of 2000. Prior to moving to Fort Worth, Daniel was the Assistant Director of the National Trust's Southern Office in Charleston, South Carolina. There he was responsible for managing field services in a 10-state region. In particular, he led National Trust activities in Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, and West Virginia. Daniel carried out special projects in the areas of organizational development and the management of historic properties.

As Director of the Southwest Office, he works with local and statewide partners to save historic resources and build the preservation movement in Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. This includes building organizational capacity, serving as an advocate, and providing technical and emergency financial assistance where possible. In addition, Daniel has extensive fundraising responsibilities associated with generating the resources necessary to operate the Southwest Office.

Before joining the National Trust in 1991, Daniel worked in preservation for five years at the state and local levels of government in Kentucky. Daniel is an ex-officio board member of Preservation Texas, and he serves on the City of Fort Worth's steering committee for historic preservation.

He received his BA in American studies from the University of Notre Dame and his MA in folk studies/historic preservation from Western Kentucky University.

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